

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 SAJ-01 DRC-01 EB-11 COME-00 SIL-01

LAB-06 /124 W

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R 272013Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8306

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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E.7?. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH GENERAL ELECTION: IT LOOKS TO BE
CLOSE

REF: LONDON 2451

SUMMARY: LATEST OPINION POLLS SHOW A NARROWING CON-
SERVATIVE LEAD OVER LABOR AND INCREASING LIBERAL
STRENGTH. RECENT ADVERSE PRICE AND TRADE STATISTICS
HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY AFFECTED THE TORY POSITION AND THE
RRPARALPTLS WITH THE 1970 ELECTION ARE MUCH NOTED. THERE
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ARE NO CLEAR SIGNS, HOWEVER, WHICH PERMIT ANY CONFIDENT

FORECAST ABOUT THE RESULTS OF THIAFLOSE-RUN ELECTION.
END SUMMARY.

1. THREE OPINION POLLS PUBLISHED IN THE PAST 24 HOURS
HAVESHOWN A DROP IN THE CONSERVATIVE LEAD OVER LABOR,
TWO OF THEM SHOW THE LIBERALS INCREASING THEIR SHARE OF
VOTES.

- NOP SHOWS TORIES WITH 2.8 PERCENT LEAD OVER LABOR
AS AGAINST 5 PERCENT IN PREVIOUS WEEK.
LIBERALS DOWN TO 21.3 FROM 22 PERCENT.
- LOUIS HARRIS SHOWS TORIES WITH 3.5 PERCENT OVER
LABOR AS COMPARED WITH 6.5 FOUR DAYS PREVIOUSLY.
LIBERALS UP FROM 23.5 TO 25 PERCENT.
- ORC GIVES TORIES A TENUOUS 1.5 PERCENT LEAD OVER
LABOR, WITH LIBERALS UP TO 25.5 PERCENT.

2. A NUMBER OF REASONS MAY ACCOUNT FOR THE FALTERING
OF TORY SUPPORT IN THE LATEST POLLS. ONE IS THAT THE
WEEKEND POLLS PROBABLY REGISTER REACTION TO THE ALLELIT
ERROR OVER CALCULATING MINERS' PAY; ANOTHER IS THE
EFFECT OF ENOCH POWELL'S ATTACKS. A THIRD IS THE
GENERALLY GOOD PERFORMANCE OF LIBERAL LEADER JEREMY
THORPE IN A SATURDAY PARTY POLITICAL TV BROADCAST. THE
ADVERSE IMPACT OF A RECORD TRADE DEFICIT ANNOUNCED ON
MONDAY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN REFLECTED IN THE POLLS,
ALTHOUGH BAD FIGURES HAD BEEN FORECAST.

3. IN AN ECONOMIC SITUATION WITH FEW BRIGHT SPOTS, THE
GOVERNMENT PARTY IS BOUND TO SUFFER FROM THE FLOW OF
STATISTICS ABOUT RISING PRICES, WORSENING TERMS OF
TRADE, DECLINING PRODUCTION, ETC. FORTUNATELY,
PARADOXICALLY, THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY SOME VERY LARGE
BANKS AND INDUSTRIAL CONCERNS OF RECORD PROFITS FOR THE
PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR HAS BEEN AN ACUTE EMBARRASSMENT
DURING A CAMPAIGN IN WHICH TORY EFFORTS TO LIMIT WAGE
INCREASES HAVE FEATURED SO PROMINENTLY AND IN WHICH THE
LABOR PARTY HAS ATTACKED THE TORY RECORD ON CONTROLLING
PRICES AND PROFITS.

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4. A FURTHER POTENTIALLY DAMAGING DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN A STATEMENT BY CBI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CAMPBELL ADAMSON THAT HE THOUGHT THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF TUC AGREEMENT TO AMEND IT, THE NEXT GOVERNMENT SHOULD SCRAP THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT AND DEVELOP NEW GUIDELINES FOR COOPERATION THROUGH CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE TRADE UNIONS AND INDUSTRY. ADAMSON'S REMARKS WERE ORIGINALLY MADE IN AN OFF-THE-RECORD QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOLLOWING A LONG-SCHEDULED SPEECH TO AN INDUSTRIAL

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GROUP. BUT THEY QUICKLY LEEKED OUT. COMING IN THE MIDST OF A CAMPAIGN IN WHICH INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS HAVE

PLAYED A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE, ADAMSON'S REMARKS STRUCK THE GOVERNMENT LIKE A BOLT OUT OF THE BLUE. WHILE THERE HAS BEEN A HASTY DENIAL THAT ADAMSON'S REMARKS REFLECTED THE CBI'S POSITION, THE RESULTS OBVIOUSLY WILL BE HARMFUL TO THE TORY CAUSE.

5. THE NARROWING OF THE CONSERVATIVE LEAD OVER LABOR HAS COME AS SOMETHING OF A SURPRISE TO MOST OBSERVERS IF FOR NO OTHER REASON THAN THAT THE LABOR CAMPAIGN HAS SEEMED LACKLUSTER AND ITS LEADERS UNINSPIRING. NEVERTHELESS, THE CLOSE PARALLELS BETWEEN THIS CAMPAIGN AND THE 1970 ONE, WHICH SAW THE OPPOSITION TORIES CLOSING IN ON A LABOR GOVERNMENT IN ITS FINAL DAYS, ARE MUCH REMARKED ON. IF THE ADAMSON GAFFE AND OTHER UNFAVORABLE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE BEEN UNSETTLING TO SOME CONSERVATIVES, THEY HAVE NOT SEEMED TO DAUNT THE PRIME MINISTER. THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN HEATH HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL IN LIMITING THE ADVERSE IMPACT OF ATTACKS MADE ON THE TORY RECORD, IN REGAINING THE INITIATIVE AND RETURNING TO HIS CHOSEN CAMPAIGN THEME THAT BRITAIN WILL NEED A FIRM, STRONG AND FAIR GOVERNMENT IN THE VERY DIFFICULT TIME AHEAD. ALL THE SIGNS NOW POINT TO A VERY CLOSE ELECTION.

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